Seneca Valley School District

January 2021

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

Building trust

Encourage your child to imagine that when he keeps promises or is honest, he's making deposits in a trust "bank." When he's dishonest, however, his "account" is "in the red"—meaning friends and family can't rely on him. If that happens, ask him to think about ways he could begin refilling his account, perhaps by writing a letter of apology.

Learn sign language

When your tween considers languages to study, she might add American Sign Language to her list. Knowing how to sign would let her communicate with friends or others who are hearing-impaired. Plus, demand is rising for interpreters, so the skill could lead to a career. Her school may offer the course, or she can find one online.

DID YOU KNOW? The suicide rate for children ages 10–14 tripled between 2007 and 2017. Be aware of warning signs, which include changes in sleep habits, saying things like "I'm worthless" or "There's no point anymore," or withdrawing from family and friends. If you ever believe your tween is in immediate danger, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK.

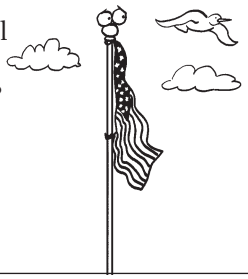
Worth quoting

"Be the best of whatever you are."
Martin Luther King Jr.

Just for fun

Q: What flies all day but never goes anywhere?

A: A flag.



Great expectations

Setting expectations for your tween tells her, "I believe you can do this!" And that can motivate her to do her very best. Try these strategies to develop and share your expectations.

Know where to start

Think of your middle schooler's goals as rungs on a ladder, with an ultimate goal (say, going to college) at the top. To set realistic expectations, start by considering where she is now (regularly getting Cs on papers, not keeping up with assigned reading). Then, let her know you expect her to climb up at least one rung next semester or month (earning Bs on papers, reading 30 minutes a day).

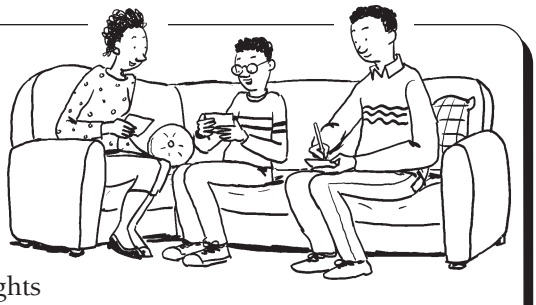
Focus on effort

Telling your child that you expect her to do better in art class because she's "talented" can send the message that she can't do better in subjects in which you don't think she's "talented." Instead, try talking about how she raised her English grade last year after working hard. She'll develop a growth mindset—the belief that she can succeed in anything she puts effort into.

Help her plan

When you set an expectation for your tween that she's struggling to meet, ask what might be holding her back. Say you expect her to complete and turn in all assignments, but she often runs out of time. Help her come up with ideas to get around these roadblocks. Maybe she could start assignments sooner and find strategies to avoid time-wasters.

Bring history to life



History is woven from individual stories—just like your child's! Help him expand his view of history with these activities.

■ **Read a personal perspective.** Encourage your tween to read a first-person account from a time period he's studying. For the civil rights movement, he might choose an autobiography of Rosa Parks. How does her story give him a better understanding of that moment in history?

■ **Write your own history.** Challenge each family member to write a short summary titled "A History of Our Family's Year." Compare your versions, and talk about how each person's viewpoint and experiences determined what they wrote. Together, combine the accounts into a more complete picture of your family's year.

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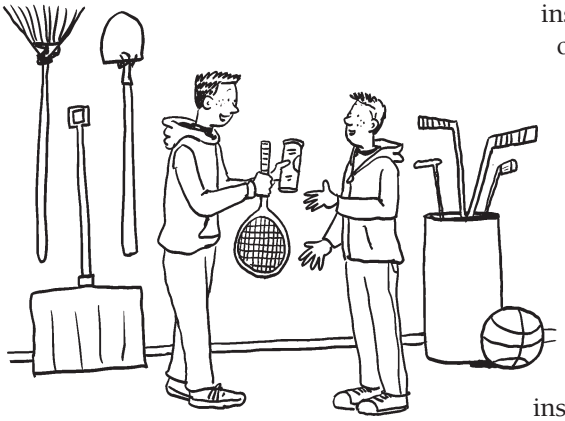
Keep the peace at home

Skipped chores, sibling squabbles … most families have occasional conflicts. With everyone spending more time together these days, tempers are even likelier to flare up. Use these ideas to maintain the peace.



Choose your words carefully. Speaking from anger can cause small annoyances (someone not emptying the dishwasher) to spiral into bigger issues ("You never do anything you're supposed to do!"). Take a deep breath, then focus on the problem rather than the person. It's also helpful to use "I" instead of "you" statements. ("*I* feel overwhelmed and angry when everyone doesn't do their part around the house" vs. "Why can't *you* keep track of your daily chores?") You'll lower tensions and open the door to finding a solution.

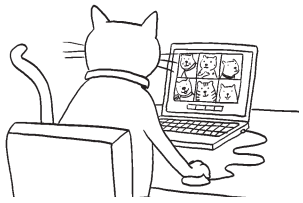
Negotiate and compromise. View conflicts as problems to be solved. If siblings argue over borrowing each other's things, for instance, encourage them to clearly explain why they're upset. ("You borrow my baseball bat but won't share your equipment." "That's because I'm afraid you'll break my tennis racket.") Then, help them find a solution they both feel okay about. ("We'll share as long as we get permission first and take good care of each other's stuff.")

Dial down fears about speaking up

Taking part in discussions helps your tween connect with her classwork and her classmates. Not everyone is comfortable speaking up, though, especially during video classes. Share these ways to make it easier.

Do prep work

Your middle grader will feel more confident if she already has ideas in mind. Before class, encourage her to preview the material that will be covered. She can write down questions or comments so she'll be ready to jump in.



Practice at home

Suggest setting up video chats with grandparents or friends for "dress rehearsals." Have her ask for specific feedback: Is she speaking loudly enough? What can they see in the background? Hearing from people she trusts that she's coming across great (or making adjustments based on their advice) will help her feel more comfortable during class.

OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ideas that promote school success, parent involvement, and more effective parenting.

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Q&A Independence days

Q *I'm still doing things for my tween that I did when she was little. How can I shift more responsibility to her?*

A By letting your daughter handle more things now, you'll give her a chance to be independent while she's still under your watchful eye. Think of it as "training wheels" for adulthood.

For example, she should be able to make simple meals and snacks, as well as handle personal chores like sorting her laundry, putting away clothes, changing her sheets, and cleaning her room.

Offer support, perhaps by stocking healthy snack options, showing her how full the washer and dryer should be, and demonstrating how to change a pillowcase more easily. But let her take responsibility for following through. If she can't find something in her messy room, she's the one who will need to straighten up.

Add more responsibilities as she shows she can handle them—odds are, she can!

Parent to Parent Test-taking tips

My son Philip studied hard for tests and knew the material. But he still got nervous and didn't do as well as he could have. Since his cousin Gina was succeeding in high school, I suggested that he talk to her.

First, Gina sent Philip a link to a deep-breathing exercise she uses when she's nervous before a test. At first, he felt silly doing it, but he had to admit that it helped him feel less stressed.

His cousin also recommended glancing quickly through the whole test first, so Philip would know how fast to work. Lately my son has been timing himself doing practice tests to get a feel for the right pace.

Finally, when teachers allow scrap paper, Philip uses Gina's strategy of jotting down formulas as soon as tests are handed out so he'll have a reference.

Philip's test grades have been trending up lately, and he doesn't seem quite as nervous on test days.